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Artificial Intelligence and Remote Sensing in Indian Agriculture: Pathways to Environmental Sustainability

Mayank Nalia[1], Yogesh Kumar[2], Ved Prakash[3*], Pawan Jeet[4], Raghavendra Singh[3], Anil Kumar Singh[4] and Omprakash Meena[5]

ABSTRACT

Indian agriculture, covering over 180 million hectares and sustaining more than 800 million livelihoods, stands at a crossroads of mounting environmental pressures and unprecedented technological opportunity. Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), and satellite-based Remote Sensing (RS) are rapidly transforming how crops are monitored, how resources are allocated, and how environmental risks are managed. This article presents a comprehensive, evidence-based review of the current state and future trajectory of AI–RS integration in Indian agriculture, with particular emphasis on environmental sustainability and alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Key applications examined include satellite-based crop health monitoring using spectral indices, drone-guided variable-rate agrochemical application, ML-driven crop yield forecasting, soil organic carbon estimation, and water-use optimization through smart irrigation. Quantitative evidence from peer-reviewed literature demonstrates that AI–RS integration can reduce water consumption by 25–40%, reduce pesticide uses by 20–30%, and improve yield prediction accuracy to above 90% in optimal conditions. India-specific challenges including the digital divide, sparse agri-datasets, and interoperability deficits are critically examined. A strategic roadmap aligned with India's Digital Agriculture Mission (2025–2026), the National e-Governance Plan in Agriculture (NeGPA), and the India AI Mission (2024) is proposed to guide policy and institutional action.

Keywords: Precision agriculture, Convolutional neural networks, NDVI, Remote sensing, Soil carbon mapping, Smart irrigation, Digital agriculture

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the bedrock of Indian civilization for millennia. In current scenarios, it faces a crisis of scale, climate change (Prakash et al., 2016), and sustainability that no traditional practice can fully resolve. India's agricultural sector contributes approximately 18% of GDP, employs nearly 45% of the workforce, and must simultaneously produce food for a population projected to exceed 1.67 billion by 2050 (UN, 2022). Against this backdrop, the sector also accounts for roughly 80% of national freshwater withdrawals and is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through rice cultivation, enteric fermentation, and synthetic fertilizer application (Pokhariyal et al., 2023).

The global AI in agriculture market was valued at USD 1.7 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach USD 4.7 billion by 2028, growing at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 23.1% (IndiaAI, 2025). India itself hosts over 2,800 agri-technology startups and has attracted private equity investment exceeding 6,600 crore in the last four years alone (TCI, 2025). These figures are not merely market statistics. They signal a structural shift in how farming intelligence is being generated, distributed, and applied.The convergence of three transformative technologies— Artificial Intelligence (AI) with its subfields of Machine Learning (ML) and Deep Learning (DL), satellite and drone-based Remote Sensing (RS), and the Internet of Things (IoT) creates an integrated precision agriculture stack that has the potential to simultaneously raise productivity, reduce environmental footprints, and build climate resilience. This article synthesizes peer-reviewed evidence and policy developments to present a rigorous yet accessible analysis of how this technological stack is being deployed across India's diverse agro-climatic zones, and what it will take to scale these innovations equitably.

Conceptual Framework: The AI–RS–IoT Precision Agriculture Stack

Modern digital agriculture does not operate through any

[1]CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, Haryana, India-125004
[2]CCSHAU College of Agriculture, Bawal, Rewari, Haryana, India -123501
[3]ICAR-Indian Institute of Farming Systems Research, Modipuram, Meerut, UP, India-250110
[4]ICAR-Research Complex for Eastern Region, Patna, Bihar, India-800014
[5]ICAR- Central Arid Zone Research Institute, Jodhpur, India- 342003
[*]Corresponding Author E-mail: jyanivedprakash486@gmail.com

single technology but through an integrated, layered data pipeline that connects the physical environment to actionable farm-level decisions. Figure 1 illustrates this architecture, which has three principal layers: data acquisition, data processing and modelling, and decision output

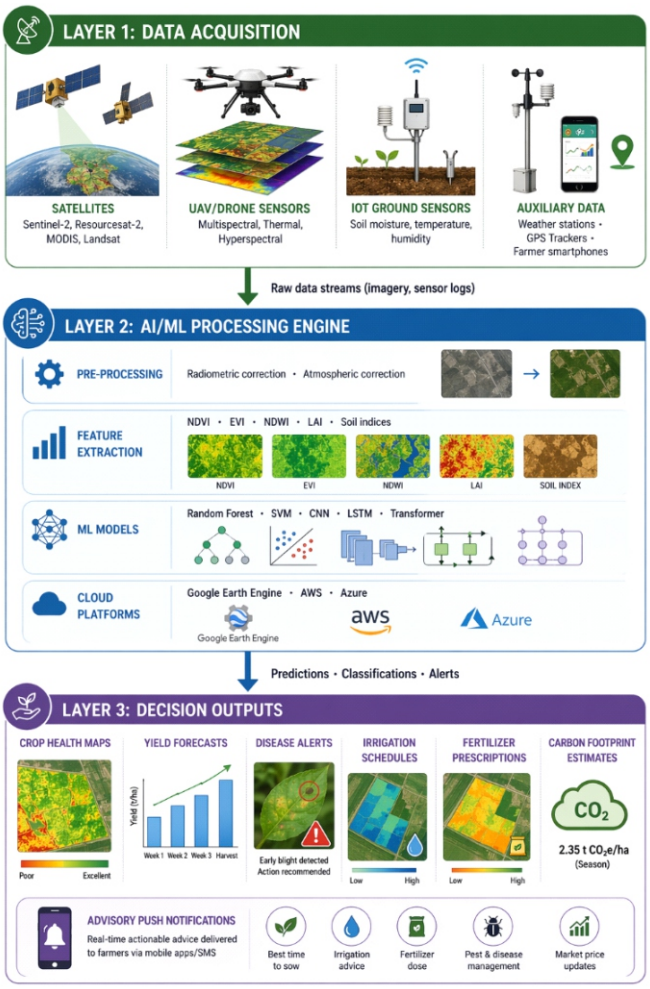


Fig. 1: Conceptual architecture of the AI–RS–IoT integrated precision agriculture stack
*NDVI = Normalized Difference Vegetation Index;
EVI = Enhanced Vegetation Index;
NDWI = Normalized Difference Water Index;
LAI = Leaf Area Index; CNN = Convolutional Neural Network;
LSTM = Long Short-Term Memory; SVM = Support Vector Machine.

Each layer has a distinct role. Layer 1 converts physical phenomena—crop reflectance, soil temperature, rainfall into digital signals. Layer 2 transforms these raw signals into interpretable patterns through AI algorithms. Layer 3 delivers actionable prescriptions to extension agents, farm management systems, or directly to farmers via mobile applications. The environmental sustainability dividend arises primarily in Layer 3, where data-informed decisions replace blanket agrochemical applications and water scheduling.

Remote Sensing for Agricultural Monitoring: Sensors, Indices and Platforms

Satellite Platforms and Spectral Capabilities

Remote sensing acquires information about Earth's surface without direct physical contact, exploiting electromagnetic radiation reflected or emitted by surfaces across visible, near-infrared (NIR), short-wave infrared (SWIR), and thermal infrared (TIR) portions of the spectrum. For agricultural applications in India, a hierarchy of satellite platforms is routinely used (Table 1), each offering distinct trade-offs between spatial resolution, temporal revisit frequency, and spectral richness (Ashourloo et al., 2023).

Table 1. Key satellite and UAV remote sensing platforms used in Indian precision agriculture.

Satellite Platform	Spatial Resolution	Revisit Time	Key Spectral Bands	Primary Agricultural Use
Sentinel-2A/B (ESA)	10–60 m	5 days	13 bands (VNIR–SWIR)	Crop mapping, soil moisture, vegetation stress detection
Resourcesat-2 (ISRO)	5.8–56 m	24 days	3 bands (LISS-III, AWiFS)	National crop area estimation, FASAL programme
Landsat-8/9 (NASA/USGS)	15–100 m	16 days	11 bands (VNIR–TIR)	Long-term land use change, soil organic carbon
MODIS (NASA)	250–1000 m	1–2 days	36 bands	Drought monitoring, large-scale phenology
PlanetScope (Planet Labs)	3 m	Daily	4–8 bands (VNIR)	Field-level precision monitoring
UAV / Drone	< 5 cm	On demand	Multispectral/hyperspectral	Variable-rate application, disease hotspot mapping

*VNIR = Visible Near-Infrared; SWIR = Short-Wave Infrared;
TIR = Thermal Infrared; FASAL = Forecasting Agricultural Output using Space, Agrometeorology and Land-based Observations.

Vegetation and Soil Indices

Spectral indices derived from satellite imagery condense multi-band reflectance into scalar values that proxy specific biophysical or biochemical properties of crops and soils. The Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI), defined as (NIR – Red) / (NIR + Red), remains the most widely applied index globally for tracking crop vigour and stress. Elevated NDVI values (0.6–0.9) indicate dense, photosynthetically active vegetation, whereas values below 0.3 typically signal senescence, drought stress, or pest damage.

Beyond NDVI, a suite of complementary indices has been developed to address its saturation limitations at high

biomass densities and its insensitivity to specific stress types (Table 2). Hyperspectral platforms, which capture hundreds of narrow contiguous spectral bands, enable the retrieval of biochemical parameters—including leaf nitrogen content, chlorophyll-a concentration, and soil organic carbon (SOC) with considerably greater precision than broadband multispectral sensors (Thenkabail and Lyon, 2018).

Table 2. Key spectral indices used in precision agriculture remote sensing

Index	Formula	Sensitivity	Application in India
NDVI	(NIR − Red) / (NIR + Red)	Chlorophyll, LAI	Paddy and wheat area estimation (FASAL)
EVI	2.5 × (NIR − Red) / (NIR + 6×Red − 7.5×Blue + 1)	Biomass, canopy	Sugarcane growth monitoring
NDWI	(Green − NIR) / (Green + NIR)	Canopy water content	Irrigation scheduling, drought alerts
SAVI	(NIR − Red) / (NIR + Red + L) × (1 + L)	Soil-adjusted LAI	Sparse vegetation in dryland zones
NDRE	(Red-Edge − Red) / (Red-Edge + Red)	Nitrogen, chlorophyll	Fertilizer optimization in wheat
BSI	(SWIR + Red − NIR − Blue) / (SWIR + Red + NIR + Blue)	Bare soil, SOC	Soil health mapping under Digital Agriculture Mission

*LAI = Leaf Area Index; SOC = Soil Organic Carbon;
SAVI = Soil-Adjusted Vegetation Index;
NDRE = Normalized Difference Red-Edge;
BSI = Bare Soil Index; EVI = Enhanced Vegetation Index.

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning Methods in Agricultural Remote Sensing

Algorithm Taxonomy and Performance Benchmarks

The translation of raw spectral data into actionable intelligence requires AI algorithms capable of handling high-dimensional, spatially correlated, and temporally dynamic datasets. The literature identifies a clear progression from traditional machine learning to deep learning architectures, with performance gains at the cost of increased data and computational demands (Kamilaris and Prenafeta-Boldú, 2018; Liakos et al., 2018).

Traditional ML algorithms Random Forest (RF), Support Vector Machine (SVM), and Gradient Boosting remain workhorses in agricultural RS, valued for their interpretability and performance on moderate-sized datasets. Deep learning models, particularly Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) and Long Short-Term Memory networks (LSTMs), excel when large labelled datasets are available and when spatial (image-based) or temporal (time-series) patterns dominate the classification task (Kamilaris & Prenafeta-Boldú, 2018).

Table 3. Classification of major AI/ML algorithm families used in agricultural remote sensing, with indicative accuracy ranges Compiled from peer-reviewed literature (Kamilaris & Prenafeta-Boldú, 2018; Liakos et al., 2018; Anastasiou et al., 2025).

Algorithm Class	Examples	Typical Accuracy	Data Requirement	Primary Agricultural Application
Decision Tree / Ensemble	RF, XGBoost, GBM	85–93%	Moderate	Crop classification, yield prediction, soil property mapping
Support Vector Machine	SVM, SVR	80–90%	Low–Moderate	Crop disease detection, land-use classification
Artificial Neural Network	ANN, MLP	82–91%	Moderate	Yield forecasting, irrigation scheduling
Convolutional Neural Network	ResNet, VGG, EfficientNet	90–97%	High	Plant disease identification from imagery, weed detection
Recurrent / LSTM Network	LSTM, BiLSTM, Transformer	88–95%	High (temporal)	Time-series crop growth modeling, climate-adaptive forecasting
Hybrid / Ensemble DL	CNN-LSTM, U-Net	92–98%	Very High	Crop mapping, disease outbreak prediction, carbon estimation

*RF = Random Forest; GBM = Gradient Boosting Machine;
SVM = Support Vector Machine;
CNN = Convolutional Neural Network;
LSTM = Long Short-Term Memory.

Data Processing Workflow

A standardized remote sensing data processing workflow underpins reliable agricultural intelligence (Figure 2). Raw satellite imagery undergoes radiometric calibration and atmospheric correction before spectral indices are computed. These derived products feed into ML training pipelines, where ground truth data—collected via field surveys, destructive sampling, or farmer records—provide the labelled examples necessary for supervised learning. Model outputs are validated against held-out ground truth before deployment in advisory systems.

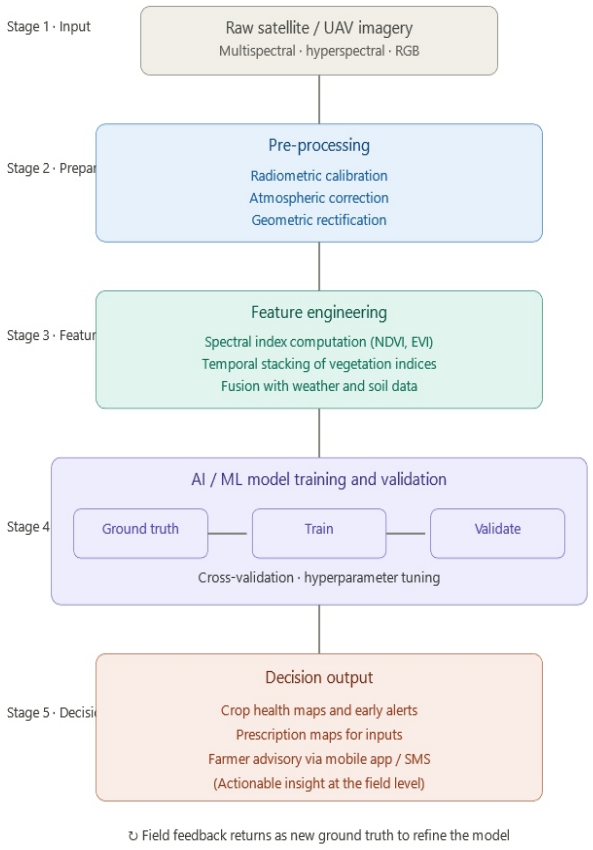


Fig. 2: Standardized remote sensing and AI data processing workflow for agricultural decision support. Adapted from Pokhariyal et al. (2023) and Anastasiou et al. (2025)

Key Application Domains and Quantitative Evidence

Crop Disease and Pest Detection

Timely identification of biotic stresses is one of the most impactful applications of AI in Indian agriculture, where crop losses due to diseases and pests are estimated to reduce potential production by 15–25% annually. Convolutional Neural Networks trained on image datasets of infected leaves have achieved classification accuracies exceeding 95% for pathogens including wheat rust (Puccinia species), rice blast (Magnaporthe oryzae), and cotton bollworm (Helicoverpa armigera) (Kamilaris and Prenafeta-Boldú, 2018).

Drone-based hyperspectral imaging enables detection of fungal infections before visual symptoms appear typically 7–14 days earlier than conventional field scouting. This 'early warning' window is agronomically critical, as targeted fungicide application at sub-symptomatic stages can reduce total chemical use by 30–40% compared to calendar-based spraying programmes, with measurable reductions in soil and water contamination. The Kisan e-Mitra chatbot, deployed by ICAR as an AI-powered advisory service, exemplifies this principle at scale, providing disease diagnosis and management recommendations in multiple Indian languages through a smartphone interface.

Crop Yield Prediction and Area Estimation

Accurate pre-harvest yield forecasting is foundational for food security planning, price stabilization, and insurance underwriting. India's FASAL (Forecasting Agricultural output using Space, Agrometeorology and Land-based Observations) programme, operated jointly by ISRO, IMD, and ICAR, uses multi-date Resourcesat-2 LISS-III imagery in conjunction with crop simulation models (DSSAT, InfoCrop) to generate state-level crop production estimates for paddy, wheat, and rapeseed.

The integration of ML with RS data has substantially improved the accuracy and spatial granularity of these forecasts. Anastasiou et al. (2025), reviewing Mediterranean agroecosystem studies, found that Random Forest and SVM models coupled with Sentinel-2 time-series achieved R^2 values of 0.85–0.94 for wheat and olive yield prediction—comparable performance has been reported for Indian wheat by Meraj et al. (2022), who used Sentinel-2 and MODIS data with RF regression (R^2 = 0.89, RMSE = 0.27 t ha^{-1}). LSTM networks, which capture temporal dependencies in crop growth trajectories, further improve early-season yield estimates by integrating weather reanalysis data with phenological NDVI profiles.

Soil Health Mapping and Carbon Sequestration

Soil is the foundation of agricultural productivity and a critical carbon reservoir. India's soils have experienced significant degradation—an estimated 147 Mha is affected by soil erosion, salinization, or waterlogging. ML-driven analysis of hyperspectral and multispectral imagery, combined with terrain variables and legacy soil survey data, enables the generation of spatially explicit soil health maps at scales relevant to farm management.

The Bare Soil Index (BSI) derived from Landsat-8 SWIR and NIR bands, when paired with Cubist regression tree models, has produced Soil Organic Carbon (SOC) estimates with RMSE values of 2.1–3.4 g kg^{-1} across diverse Indian agro-climatic zones (Gómez-Chabla et al., 2025). This capability is of direct relevance to India's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, which commits to creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5–3.0 Gt CO_2 equivalent through enhanced forest and soil carbon by 2030. Dynamic, ML-generated SOC maps can provide the monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) framework necessary to operationalize this commitment at scale.

Smart Irrigation and Water-Use Efficiency

Irrigation accounts for approximately 80% of India's total freshwater consumption, and inefficiency particularly in flood-irrigated paddy systems which results in enormous consumptive losses. AI-driven irrigation management systems integrate soil moisture data from IoT sensors, reference evapotranspiration (ETo) estimates derived from thermal RS, and short-range weather forecasts to compute

spatially and temporally precise irrigation schedules.

Documented water savings from smart irrigation systems in India range from 25% to 40% relative to conventional scheduling, depending on crop type and existing infrastructure (Gómez-Chabla et al., 2025). In a pilot deployment of IoT-guided drip irrigation for cotton in Maharashtra, water productivity (kg lint per m^3) improved by 32% while fertilizer use efficiency increased by 18%. The energy co-benefit is equally significant: reduced pumping hours translate directly into lower electricity consumption and carbon emissions from agricultural pump sets, which account for approximately 18% of India's total electricity consumption.

Carbon Footprint Tracking and Climate-Smart Farming

Emerging AI platforms integrate multiple data streams like tillage records, fertilizer application logs, fuel consumption, residue burning events detected via MODIS thermal anomalies to estimate field-level GHG emission profiles in near-real-time. When combined with satellite-derived vegetation and soil carbon proxies, these tools provide a comprehensive Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) of farm operations without costly ground-based measurement campaigns.

In the context of India's zero-tillage wheat expansion across the Indo-Gangetic Plains (IGP), AI-assisted monitoring has documented average reductions of 28–35 kg CO_2 equivalent per hectare per season relative to conventional tillage, primarily through reduced diesel consumption and improved crop residue retention. At the IGP scale approximately 12 million hectares of wheat. This represents a mitigation potential of 0.33–0.42 million tonnes CO_2 equivalent annually, a quantifiable contribution to India's climate commitments.

Evidence Summary: AI–RS Outcomes in Indian Agriculture

Table 4 synthesizes documented outcomes from Indian and India-relevant studies, providing the quantitative basis for the claims made in Section 5. References marked with an asterisk (*) are directly India-based studies; others are from analogous agro-climatic contexts with demonstrated transferability.

Table 4. Quantitative evidence summary of AI and Remote Sensing outcomes in Indian and analogous agricultural contexts.

Application Domain	Technology Used	Outcome Metric	Reported Value	Source
Wheat yield prediction*	RF + Sentinel-2/MODIS	R^2 / RMSE	0.89 / 0.27 t ha^{-1}	Meraj et al. (2022); Pokhariyal et al. (2023)
Rice disease detection	CNN (ResNet-50)	Classification accuracy	94.8%	Kamilaris and Prenafeta-Boldú (2018)
Water-use reduction*	IoT + ML irrigation scheduler	Water saving vs. conventional	25–40%	Gómez-Chabla et al. (2025)
Pesticide reduction	Drone + ML site-specific spray	Reduction vs. blanket spray	20–30%	Kakaei et al. (2025)
SOC mapping*	Hyperspectral RS + Cubist regression	RMSE (g kg^{-1})	2.1–3.4	Gómez-Chabla et al. (2025)
Crop area estimation*	SVM + Resourcesat-2 LISS-III	Overall accuracy	91–96%	Pokhariyal et al. (2023)
Fertilizer saving	AI–RS variable rate application	Saving vs. uniform rate	15–30%	Gómez-Chabla et al. (2025)
Yield improvement	AI–RS precision management	Yield increase over baseline	8–15%	Anastasiou et al. (2025)
GHG mitigation (ZT wheat)*	MODIS + ML emission tracking	kg CO_2e ha^{-1} $season^{-1}$	28–35 reduction	Kakaei et al. (2025)
Crop mapping accuracy*	Random Forest + Sentinel-2	Kappa coefficient	0.87–0.93	Pokhariyal et al. (2023)

* = India-specific study. RF = Random Forest; CNN = Convolutional Neural Network; SOC = Soil Organic Carbon; ZT = Zero Tillage; RMSE = Root Mean Square Error.

ICAR's Role in the Digital Agriculture Ecosystem

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research occupies a unique institutional position at the intersection of scientific excellence and national agricultural policy. Through its network of 113 institutes, 71 Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and hundreds of All India Coordinated Research Projects (AICRPs), ICAR has both the research infrastructure and the extension reach necessary to translate laboratory-scale AI innovations into field-level impact. ICAR-IASRI (Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute) has been at the forefront of ML applications in crop forecasting, developing ensemble models that combine Naïve Bayes, RF, and ANN algorithms for yield prediction across multiple crops and states. ICAR-IARI's work on zero-tillage wheat and laser land levelling in the IGP, when combined with satellite-based monitoring, has generated one of India's most robust datasets linking agronomic practice to environmental outcome—a critical resource for ML model development.

The Kisan e-Mitra programme demonstrates ICAR's capacity for farmer-facing digital deployment. The AI-powered chatbot, accessible via WhatsApp and voice call, provides location-specific advisories on crop protection, soil management, and weather-responsive planting decisions in eight Indian languages. As of 2025, the platform has facilitated

over 12 million advisory interactions, generating a rich dataset of farmer queries that is itself a valuable input for refining ML recommendation models. The FASAL programme, operated jointly by ICAR, IMD, and ISRO, represents perhaps India's most mature operational fusion of remote sensing and agronomic modelling. Using NDVI time-series from Resourcesat-2 AWiFS, FASAL generates pre-harvest crop area and production forecasts that inform the Ministry of Agriculture's procurement and price support decisions. The programme's integration of ML-based anomaly detection—which flags districts showing anomalous NDVI trajectories—has improved the timeliness of drought early warnings and input support mobilization.

Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals

The environmental sustainability dividend of AI–RS integration in Indian agriculture is most clearly articulated through its alignment with multiple Sustainable Development Goals (Table 5). This multi-goal contribution is not accidental. It reflects the systemic nature of precision agriculture interventions, which simultaneously address resource efficiency, ecological integrity, and climate resilience.

Table 5. Alignment of AI–Remote Sensing integration in Indian agriculture with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SDG	Target	Mechanism of Contribution through AI–RS in Agriculture
SDG 2: Zero Hunger	2.4	Precision AI–RS management increases crop yields by 8–15% and reduces post-harvest losses through real-time storage condition monitoring; ML yield forecasts support government procurement planning and price stabilization.
SDG 6: Clean Water	6.4	Smart AI-guided irrigation systems reduce agricultural water withdrawals by 25–40%; NDWI-based drought monitoring enables proactive conservation decisions; reduced agrochemical leaching protects water body quality.
SDG 13: Climate Action	13.2	ML-estimated SOC maps support India's NDC commitments; MODIS-based agricultural fire detection enables rapid response; zero-tillage monitoring quantifies GHG mitigation for carbon accounting.
SDG 15: Life on Land	15.3	Targeted pesticide application via drone prescription maps reduces broad-spectrum chemical exposure to soil microbiota and pollinators; SOC mapping guides land restoration prioritization.
SDG 9: Innovation	9.5	Digital agriculture drives agricultural innovation ecosystems, supports 2,800+ agritech startups, and builds rural data infrastructure as a public good enabling broader economic modernization.
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption	12.2	Variable-rate fertilizer application based on AI–RS soil maps reduces nutrient over-application, preventing eutrophication and reducing N_2O emissions from excess nitrogen.

Adapted from Kakaei et al. (2025) and Niculescu and Lardeux (2025).
*SOC = Soil Organic Carbon; NDC = Nationally Determined Contribution; GHG = Greenhouse Gas.

Challenges, Gaps, and Critical Reflections

It would be intellectually dishonest to discuss the transformative potential of AI and remote sensing in Indian agriculture without confronting the structural barriers that constrain their equitable deployment. These challenges are not peripheral. They are central to whether digital agriculture delivers a genuine 'green dividend' or merely concentrates technological gains among better-resourced farmers and agri-businesses.

The Digital Divide and Data Infrastructure

India's rural broadband penetration, while improving, remains deeply uneven. As of 2024, approximately 60% of rural households lack reliable internet connectivity, and functional digital literacy remains low among farm households aged over 45. Without meaningful connectivity, AI-powered advisory systems cannot reach the majority of India's 86 million smallholder farm families (Raghav et al., 2023). The 'last-mile problem' in digital extension is as much a sociotechnical challenge as a technological one.

Data scarcity compounds connectivity limitations. High-quality, geo-tagged, crop-specific, multi-temporal agri-datasets (the raw material of ML model training) are sparse across India's diverse agro-climatic zones. The models trained predominantly on data from relatively well-monitored zones such as Punjab and Haryana may generalize poorly to rainfed, ecologically complex systems in the northeastern states, Vidarbha, or the deccan plateau. Federated learning approaches, which allow model training across distributed, privacy-preserving datasets, represent a promising technical pathway to address this gap (Gómez-Chabla et al., 2025).

Algorithmic Transparency and Farmer Trust

Many state-of-the-art deep learning models operate as 'black boxes'. They produce accurate predictions without providing interpretable explanations for their recommendations. This opacity creates practical challenges for adoption: a farmer in Chhattisgarh asked to delay sowing by seven days based on an LSTM model's output has no obvious means to evaluate the recommendation's basis or to contextualize it against their local knowledge. Explainable AI (XAI) methods (including SHAP (SHapley Additive exPlanations) values and attention maps) are beginning to address this limitation, but their integration into user-facing advisory platforms remains rare in the Indian context.

Environmental Footprint of Digital Infrastructure

A critical irony of AI-driven environmental sustainability is that the computational infrastructure underlying these systems is itself energy-intensive. Global data centre electricity consumption exceeded 415 Terawatt-hours (TWh) in 2024 and is projected to reach 945 TWh by 2030, with AI model training constituting a rapidly growing share (TCI, 2025). If India's digital agriculture ecosystem is powered

predominantly by coal-based electricity, the net environmental balance of AI deployment may be less favorable than commonly assumed. Edge computing architectures—which process data closer to the source on low-power devices—and solar-powered data hubs offer pathways to decouple AI's environmental benefits from its energy footprint.

Strategic Roadmap for Scaling AI–RS in Indian Agriculture

Translating isolated pilot successes into systemic transformation requires deliberate policy architecture, institutional coordination, and sustained public investment. Figure 3 presents a phased roadmap for scaling AI–RS in Indian agriculture through 2030, organized around four interdependent pillars. To further strengthen this roadmap, the strategy must also emphasize farmer-centric implementation and last-mile institutional readiness. This includes building capacity of extension agencies (KVKs, ATMA, state agriculture departments), promoting AI literacy among farmers and rural youth, and developing interoperable digital infrastructure for seamless integration of remote sensing datasets with field-level advisory platforms. Additionally, mechanisms for data governance, transparency, and ethical AI deployment should be embedded at each phase to ensure trust, inclusiveness, and equitable access. Such an enabling ecosystem will be essential to move beyond technology demonstration towards large-scale adoption, measurable productivity gains, and climate-resilient agricultural decision-making.

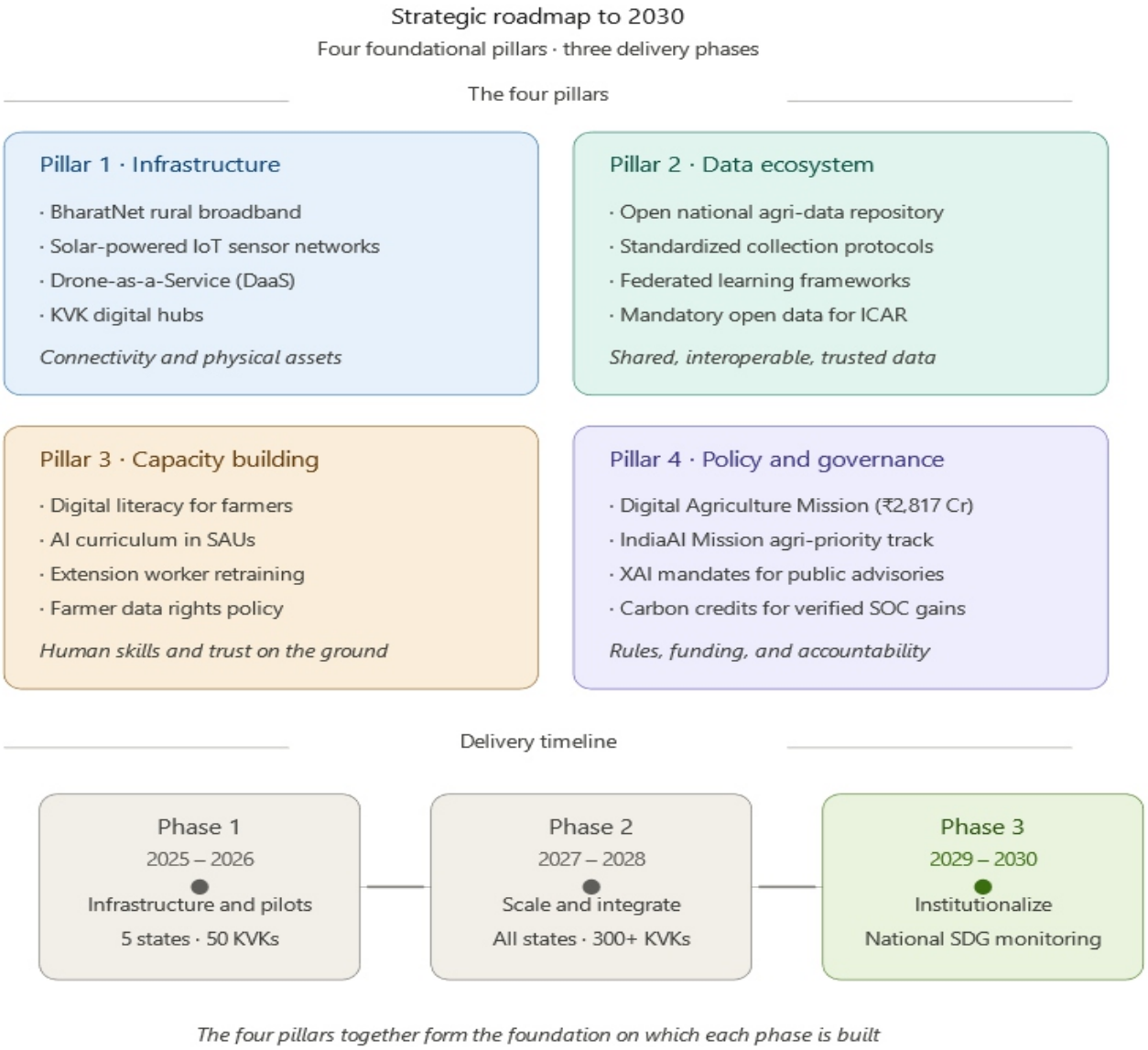


Fig. 3: Proposed four-pillar strategic roadmap for scaling AI and Remote Sensing in Indian agriculture through 2030
*SAUs = State Agricultural Universities; KVKs = Krishi Vigyan Kendras; XAI = Explainable Artificial Intelligence; SOC = Soil Organic Carbon. Aligned with India's Digital Agriculture Mission (2025–26) and IndiaAI Mission (2024).

In parallel, AI–RS driven monitoring must also be linked with emerging climate-smart land-use innovations such as agrivoltaic systems, where solar energy generation is integrated with crop cultivation. Recent experimental evidence under Indian conditions shows that agrivoltaic system-induced microclimate modifications can significantly influence wheat growth and yield performance, highlighting the need for microclimate-sensitive advisory models and decision support systems (Prakash et al., 2023; 2025). Integrating remote sensing-derived canopy temperature, radiation regimes, and crop stress indices with AI models can enable scalable evaluation and optimization of such dual-use systems across diverse agro-climatic zones.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, and Remote Sensing into Indian agriculture represents one of the most consequential technological transitions the sector has undergone since the Green Revolution. Unlike the Green Revolution, which achieved productivity gains largely through genetic and chemical intensification at significant environmental cost. The Digital Agriculture Revolution offers the prospect of higher output with lower ecological impact: more food, cleaner water, healthier soils, and a reduced carbon footprint. The evidence synthesized in this article demonstrates that this prospect is not aspirational but empirically grounded. Crop yield prediction accuracies above 90%, water savings of 25–40%, pesticide reductions of 20–30%, and measurable GHG mitigation contributions are documented outcomes, not projections. What remains aspirational is the equitable distribution of these benefits across India's 86 million smallholder farming families-a challenge that is fundamentally institutional and political, not technological.

ICAR, as India's premier agricultural research institution, is uniquely positioned to bridge this divide. Its scientific credibility, multi-institute reach, and deep farmer trust create an institutional platform that no private agritech startup can replicate. As India celebrates the 98th Foundation Day of ICAR, it is fitting to envision the next frontier not as a laboratory breakthrough but as a systemic transformation—one where the farmer in a remote district of Odisha receives the same quality of data-driven insight as the agronomist in New Delhi, where ICAR's decades of field research data become the training corpus for the next generation of Indian AI models, and where digital agriculture becomes a genuine instrument of environmental justice.

The technology is no longer the constraint. Data gaps persist, but the record is thicker than it was a decade ago and still improving. Institutions are adapting — unevenly, and late. What remains unsettled is the question of purpose. Deployment left to its own logic will follow productivity, because productivity is what gets measured and rewarded. Sustainability, equity, and the avoidance of harm are harder to count. They will not arrive as by-products. They have to be written into the design.

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